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TAGS: [OIIP](#) [RS](#) [MY](#) [SCUL](#) [SENV](#)

SUBJECT: A GLOBAL VILLAGE TACKLES GLOBAL WARMING

¶1. (U) Summary - The world is truly a global village and nowhere more so than at the U.S. Consulate General in Yekaterinburg. On Wednesday morning, April 16, 2009, the Consulate participated in a Digital Video Conference (DVC) with Kiowa Indian students at the University of North Texas in Denton, TX; indigenous students at the Lincoln Resource Center in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia; and indigenous members of the community of Ufa-Shigiri in the Russian Ural Mountains. The theme of the conference was how environmental changes have affected the cultural traditions of these ethnic communities. Participants from all three communities gave oral reports on the theme and represented their community cultures with traditional dress, song and dance. The DVC was a great exercise in cultural exchange and a step towards meaningful dialogue on global problems at a local level. End Summary

¶2. (U) About 30 children, parents, teachers and community leaders from the village of Ufa-Shigiri in the Ural Mountains near Yekaterinburg participated in the DVC. The community is comprised of indigenous peoples from the Bashkir and Tatar ethnic groups. Members of the Mari people from a nearby community also presented their cultural dress and traditions. The Bashkir and Tatar peoples are traditionally Muslim, while the Mari are Christians with strong animistic beliefs in nature spirits. They co-exist peacefully in adjoining communities. The audience in Texas consisted of approximately 20 members of the Kiowa American Indian communities of Oklahoma who traveled to Denton, TX for the DVC. The Malaysian audience consisted of about 50 members of indigenous communities from the island of Borneo, including Chinese, Malay, Iban, Bidayuh, Melanau, Kayan and Kenyah, who met for the DVC at the Lincoln Resource Center located in the Sarawak State Library of Kuching, Malaysia.

3 (U) The conference was organized by IIP/SV, as a follow up to similar successful programs in 2008 and 2007, with then Director of EPA's Region 6 Office, Dr. Jonathan Hook. In January, 2009, Dr. Hook moved to the University of North Texas (in Denton, TX) as the Director of International Indigenous and American Indian Initiatives. This was the third annual, multi-national DVC hosted by the U.S. Consulate in Yekaterinburg, Russia and the Lincoln Resource Center in Kuching, Malaysia, in cooperation with IIP's Speaker Program. Last year the DVC included students from Uganda, but because of time differences they decided not to participate this year. This year the participants from the Mari culture provided a welcome addition to the cultural exchange.

4 (U) In addition to reporting on how environmental changes have affected cultural traditions, the students shared songs and dances from their respective cultures. The effect of seeing different cultural practices from three such different corners of the earth made everyone realize that we have much more in common than our differences would suggest. One participant suggested that maybe humanity shared a common ancestor and that the links between Asia and America are more than just theoretical. The Kiowa Indians from Oklahoma reported that they were feeling more environmental effects in the form of tornadoes and droughts, while the Russians didn't notice as much environmental effects other than warmer winters. The Malaysians

mentioned that they had more rains and flooding in their region which were affecting their traditional crops. The Malaysian students were from a school Environmental Club and had more detailed environmental presentations than the other Russian and American students. There was much interest in the different forms of dance and music from each community that formed the highlight of the DVC. The participants enjoyed seeing and hearing each other on video and promised to see each other again next year.

15. (U) The regional and local media covered the event extensively. The provincial Oblast TV compiled shots from last year's DVC together with an ecological summer camp near Ufa-Shigiri and a UNESCO gathering at the village, to make a more in-depth story of Ufa-Shigiri's international connections. A local politician and member of the Bashkir Assembly of Peoples who was present at the DVC also promised to cooperate in developing these kinds of cultural exchanges. The Russian director of an NGO dealing with migration issues was also present and showed strong support for this kind of international exchange.

16. (U) Evaluating the content of the DVC in terms of the goals expressed by the organizer, there was little in-depth reporting on the effects of climate change on cultural practices. However, in terms of cultural exchange there was a high level of interaction. The technological feat of bringing together indigenous groups from such remote locations provided much of the excitement for the event. During the DVC there was a significant dropout in signal that resulted in the loss of transmission from Malaysia. Although the Russian and US audiences missed about five minutes of the Malaysian presentation, post encouraged the teachers and community leaders to say a few words in support of the event. The event was able to proceed without an awkward break in the presentations.

17. (U) For future events several recommendations could be made for the benefit of other posts contemplating cultural exchanges via DVC or webchats:

Prior preparation: a detailed background of each participating community could be sent out in English to be translated into the different languages of the participants. Names of participants and organizers, as well as a more detailed list of the dances, songs, and reports with names and subjects could have been submitted prior to the event in order to familiarize the audiences with the different cultures represented. Potential coordination with the DOS/IO, or DHR Indigenous Issues Office would be welcome.

b. Presentations: some of the cultural activities were lost due to poor camera placement. The Kiowa drum presentation suffered from not having a camera placed properly. Seating should be arranged to maximize camera placement for the "virtual audience" as well as the local audience participation.

c. Participants: more time could be given to explaining the national dress, songs, dances and traditions of each culture, although some of that can also be covered by the prior preparation of sending out information. It wasn't clear from the Malaysian presentation if several ethnic groups were represented and how they related to the majority Malay population. It might also be more effective to keep the same ages of the audiences, for example to add younger participants from the US and Malaysia. Most of the Russian participants were younger children while those from the US and Malaysia were high school age. Alternatively, the Russian audience could have brought more high school age students to the event. IIP/SV might also coordinate with America.gov and IIP/SE for maximum exposure to posts in order to encourage their participation in similar programs.

d. Content: it is important to have the participants discuss some ideas about "problem solving." Posts need to be able to report on the results and/or progressive impact of the program. In addition to raising awareness about global climate change on a community, a DVC could also address means of dealing with these changes. Reports on how different countries and

communities are dealing at the policy, legislative and local level with climate change would provide examples for the mutual benefit of the participants. The practice of ecotourism, watershed management programs, desalination for potable water, alternative crop production, benefits of alternative fuels, if and where available, etc., could provide more substance to the discussions and reports. The American participants, for example, could provide examples of new ways that groups in the United States are working towards mitigating the negative effects of global climate change? Potential coordination with the OES might also provide a stimulus for future international cooperation on these issues.

e. Logistics: The loss of Uganda due to time differences was unfortunate. On the other hand because of time constraints it may actually be better to limit the DVCs to 2 to 3 cultures. More frequent DVCs could be coordinated by the University of North Texas to provide more interaction between different cultural groups around the world. Current technology using cell phone modems and Skype allows for DVCs outside of landline and bad Internet connectivity, thus enlarging the scope of these cultural DVCs.

18. (U) Conclusion - DVCs and webchats that link indigenous groups, minority ethnic groups, and sub-cultural social groups (hip-hop fans, religious minorities, etc.) are useful tools in outreach efforts to target marginalized communities. The support of IIP's Speaker program was outstanding and should be encouraged to provide posts with this medium. The University of North Texas' video-conferencing facilities are impressive and could become the hub of indigenous connections worldwide through the auspices of the International Indigenous and American Indian Initiatives. Post encourages more development of these kinds of long-distance interactive cultural exchanges in order to address topics as complex as environmental impact on local communities, preserving cultural traditions in a pluralistic society, protecting ancestral lands from unregulated exploitation, and developing ethnic identity without promoting separatist aspirations. The diversity of America's society provides many examples of the processes of assimilation, adaptation, accommodation and assertion that are experienced by groups in other countries. Mutual exchanges sponsored by posts around the world could engender goodwill among both majority and minority groups in their host countries.

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